



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia



**act:onaid**

# Community-led Water Museum of Bangladesh

*From dystopia to futures*

**Farah Kabir**

Country Director

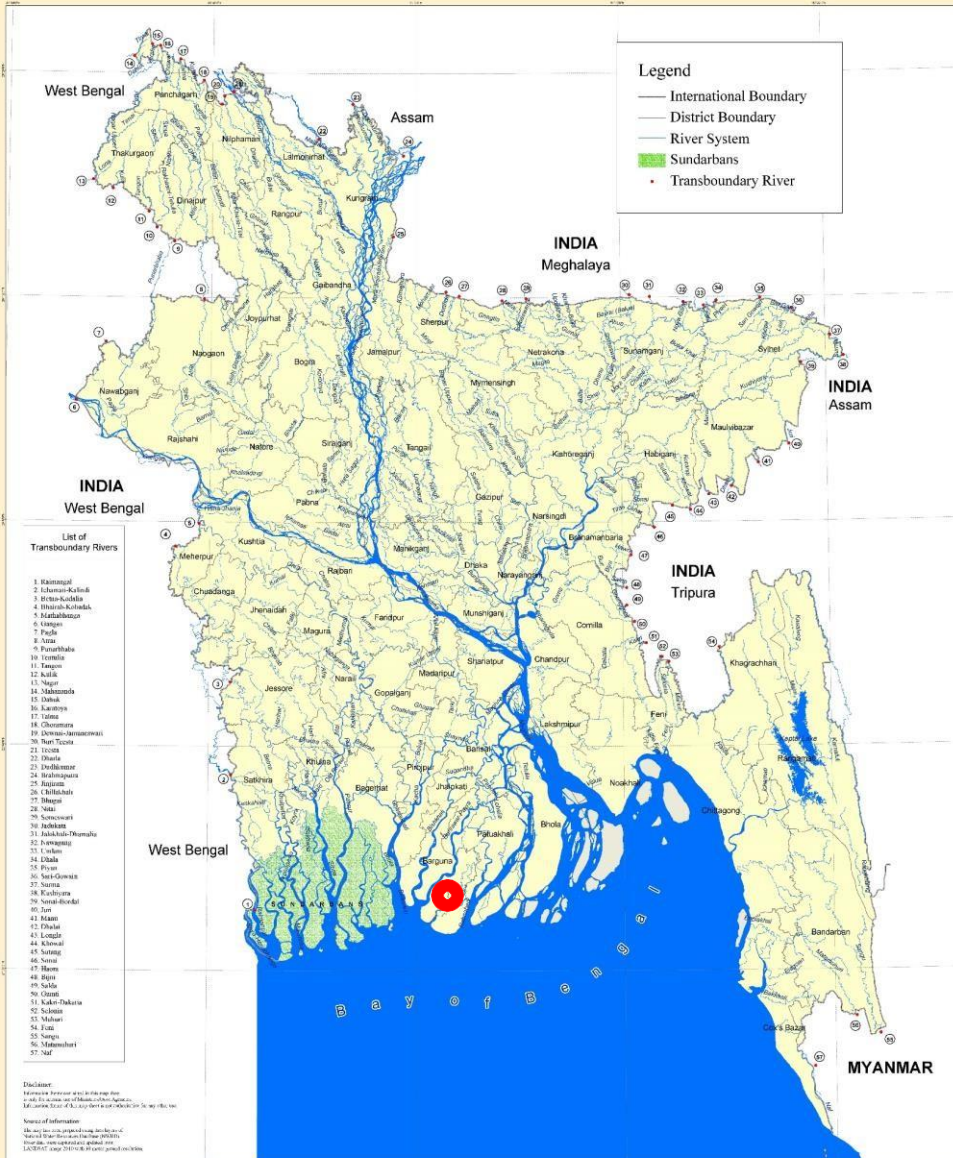
ActionAid Bangladesh

UNESCO Chair | Water, Heritage and Sustainable Development

**BEYOND  
MUSEUMS**

Tools for Promoting the Natural  
and Cultural Water Heritage

*10/12/2021*



## Ground Realities

- Bangladesh is predominately a riverine country (**±800 rivers**)
- +100 rivers **shared** with Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal
- 23.46% contribution to Bangladesh's **GDP** is from agriculture
- Surface water (mostly trans-boundary rivers) major source of **irrigation**
- Life of **people** dependent on agriculture is 'governed' by rivers

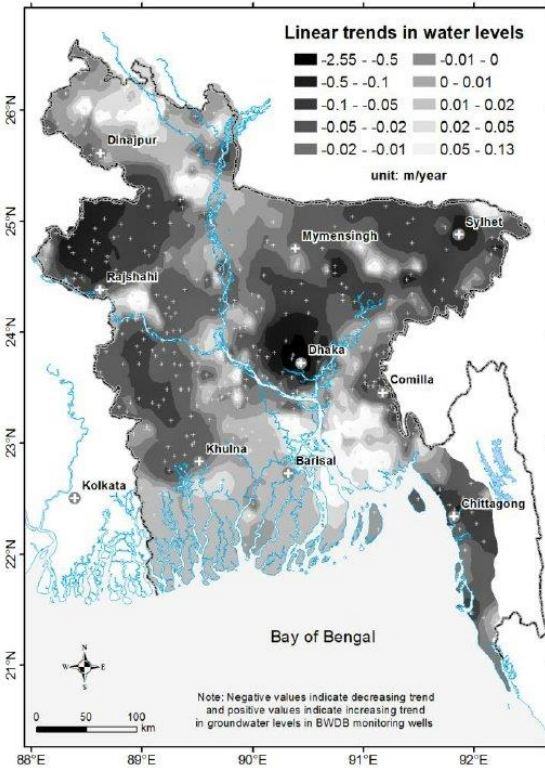


# Challenges



- Barrages and river-linking projects have disrupted **river flow**
- Low (or extremely high) influx of **sediment** affecting ecology
- Dependence on ground water for **irrigation**, industry increasing
- Sundarbans forest **threatened** due to salinity & lack of sediment

# Impacts



Long-term (1985 – 2005) trends in shallow groundwater levels throughout (Source: [Shamsudduha, 2013](#))

- Ground water level and deep aquifer reserves are **depleting**
- +100 rivers **dried up** and many polluted by industrial waste
- Agriculture, fisheries, ecology & human health hugely **affected**
- Temperature balance, rainfall, erosion, vegetation are **critical**
- Cost of agricultural goods (production, shipment) **rising**
- Govt. water resource management providing **no solution**




**act:onaid**



# Why Water Museum?

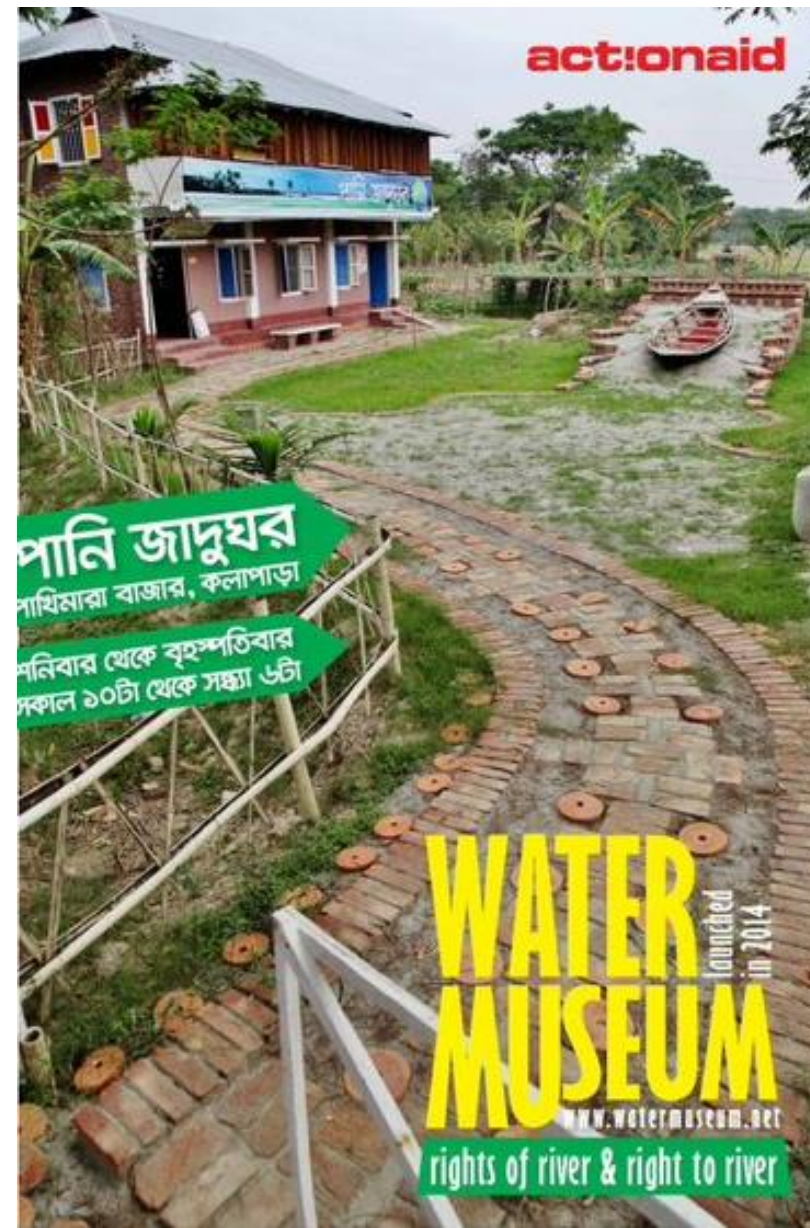


The title "Why Water Museum?" is written in a large, red, sans-serif font. To the left of the text are two interlocking gear icons, also in red.

- 
- The background of the slide is a photograph of a large dam structure over a wide river. The dam is made of concrete and has a metal walkway on top. The water is calm, and there are some rocks in the foreground. The sky is overcast.
- **Upholding** the concerns of river beyond political boundaries
  - **Re-imagining** river in humane and ecological point of view
  - **Sharing** (as opposed to dividing) the rivers and its waters
  - **Joining** the multi-country 'Water Commons' campaign
  - **Driving** the regional campaign towards international policy
  - **Searching** for solutions for people dependent on rivers

# Water Museum

- The first ever water museum in Asia.
- Launched on **29 December 2014**
- Location: Pakhimara Bazar (Kolapara, Bangladesh)
- Aim: **To create a sense of awareness among the stakeholders especially the policy makers and also to create a strong basis for policy advocacy on “Water Commons**
- Two CBOs, a local NGO, & ActionAid co-manage the Museum.



# Our call for action

- Ratify UN Law on Non-Navigational use of Water Course 1997
- Include River-Basin management agenda in SAARC
- Set a regional River Commission instead of JRC
- Set Basin wise management Authority
- Enact a River Law considering supreme court order that River is a living being.
- Free flows of river without contamination; remove all kinds of obstructions.
- Industries to be shifted far from river
- Sewerage lines to be disconnect with river & Water bodies
- Increase forestation and stop deforestation.
- Increasing irrigation by surface water instead of ground water



# Features of Water Museum

- Water sample of 57 trans-boundary rivers (also from Nepal, Myanmar)
- Visuals on river system, water bodies and people's lives
- Artifacts that represent culture and heritage in the flood plains
- Symbol such as a life-size boat stuck on dried up riverbed
- Model of local river system (Andharmanik), flora & fauna
- Map that identifies Bangladeshi and trans-boundary rivers
- Digital recourses such as documentaries, songs, dramas etc.
- Publications featuring policy, reports and people's lives



# Video of Water Museum

- Water Museum Video-



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ge6kEGb58A>



# Key Activities

- Display & open for visitors 6 days in a week.
- Learning space for students & academics.
- Sharing community experience, idea generation and taking actions.
- Annual conference on right to river and defending commons
- Promoting activism.
- Policy advocacy.
- WM [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page





পানি জাদুঘর

actionaid

পানি জাদুঘর





BONIKBARTA.COM

পানি ও নদীর অধিকার



# Community-led Action

[Video: Patuakhali Water Museum Bangladesh: A case study of community-led action](#)

# Water Walk





# Kuakata Declaration

16 March 2016 | Water Museum, Kalapara, Bangladesh

**Free flow of rivers and precipitation are the main source of fresh water in Bangladesh and ninety percent of fresh water comes from rivers. In recent times people of our country are affected by the interruption in free flow of fresh water from upstream during dry season. As a result, some of the districts in North Bengal region are showing signs of desertification. Natural resources including the Sundarbans are damaged because of salinity intrusion.**

The Human Rights Convention gives special emphasis on taking development plan while ensuring the political, social and cultural rights of the people. Apart from that Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International River were issued in the UN Watercourse Convention in 1966, which was later approved as Helsinki Rules by the General Assembly (United Nation's convention, 1997). As per the convention, there are specific provisions to ensure protection, preservation and management related to the uses of those water-courses and their waters. For any construction in a trans-boundary river, all related countries, nations, societies and stakeholders must be included in planning & implementation. Bangladesh, India and Myanmar are yet to ratify the convention.

**water is a natural resource; its rightful use & conservation are our own responsibility.**

There are 800 rivers and tributaries in our country of which 150 are trans-boundary. However, bilateral negotiations with the neighbouring countries helped recognise only 57 rivers as trans-boundary. Some of these recognised trans-boundary rivers are facing obstruction due to construction of dams in several places. Some rivers from upstream have already dried up. It has an adverse effect on the people living around the places. They are suffering from both flood and drought.

Underground water level is going down due to decreasing flow of water in water-body and too much extraction of ground water. It has a negative impact on our agro-based economy, cultural heritage, psychology and social infrastructures. River is a precious asset for mankind. It is our duty and responsibility to ensure conservation and maintenance of this resource properly.

We do not want to confine our water-centric cultural heritage and traditions within the scope of water museum. Rather we hope to preserve and uphold this heritage. Under these circumstances, we have following demands and proposals to the concerned authority:

### Internal Water Management

- 1 To secure equitable flow of water in rivers, strong legislation should be made to remove all kind of obstructions and prevent future disruption.
- 2 Prioritising our local knowledge and cultural heritage for the greater interest of people, we should refrain ourselves from taking any harmful projects instigated by international donor organisations.
- 3 As per international practice, before initiating any project, we have to make sure that all related parties and stakeholders are included in the decision making process, hence adequate measures and remedies are taken for the affected people from the implementation of such projects.
- 4 In any bilateral and regional discussion on water issues, public should be informed. Planned discussion session with the community people should be organised to create consensus.
- 5 All harmful sluice gates, dams and other establishments around the rivers and other water bodies should be removed to ensure environmental sustainability.
- 6 By amending the Water Law-2013, the conservation of rivers, environmental and ecological sustainability and people's right over water should be secured followed by the prohibition of any commercialisation of water.
- 7 We should stop repleting the wetlands and create new wetlands to reduce our dependency on ground water and increase the use of open water bodies.
- 8 Water resource is being affected and free flow of water is being interrupted because of water governance in the name of water management program, unlawful possession of river banks in the name of development and excessive pollution. Authority should immediately take appropriate measures against such harmful and (to some extent) illegal activities.
- 9 We should consider issues relating to free flow of water, rightful use of water, prevention of any kind of pollution, food security, disaster management and climate change while building any massive and permanent establishments.

### Regional Water Management

- 1 The government should ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses 1997 as soon as possible and encourage neighbouring countries to do the same.
- 2 Joint River Commission requires to be converted into the South Asian River Commission, so that the relationship based on mutual trust can be put together on water issues among the SAARC countries.

# Kuakata Declaration



# Water Conference

- Total 6 Water Conferences took place on the following themes-
  - ✓ Right to Water and Defending Commons
  - ✓ Water Democracy
  - ✓ Water Roots Innovation
  - ✓ River a Living Being
  - ✓ Legalising River Rights: People, Politics and Practices
  - ✓ Water, Climate and Justice in the Wake of COVID-19

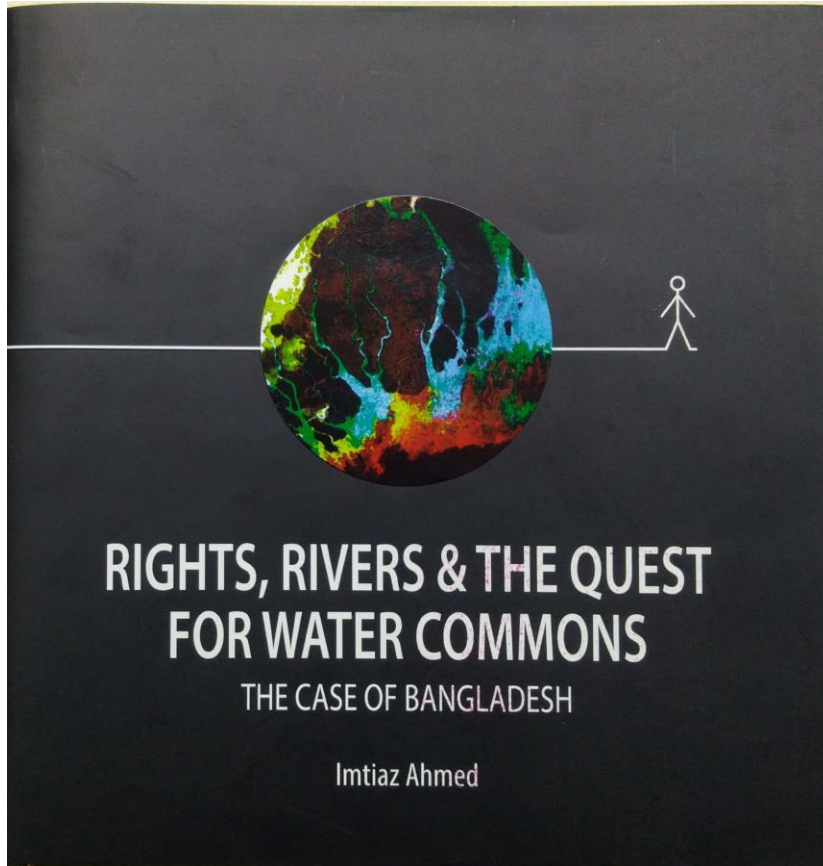


# Achievements

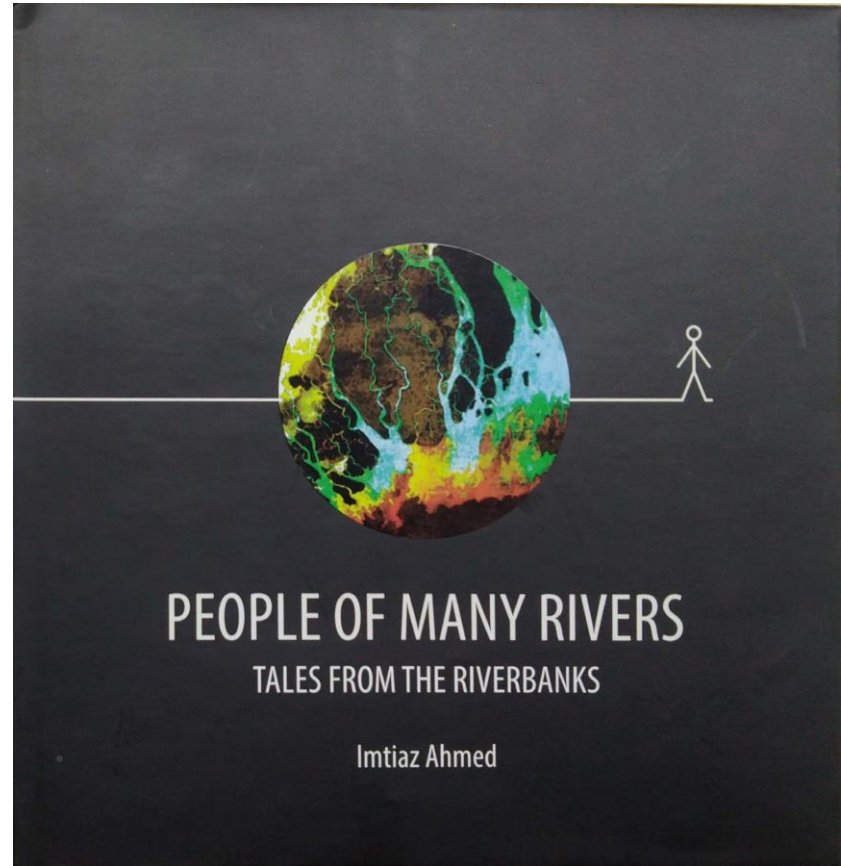
- **+2K people** including Govt. officials visited the Museum.
- Appreciative, visitors demanded **expansion** in terms of structure and contents.
- The online portal and media reports have helped reach **policy makers**. Community people consider themselves a part of the 'Water Commons' **campaign**.
- 



# Publications



**Rights, River & the Quest for  
Water Commons**  
The Case of Bangladesh  
Imtiaz Ahmed



**People of Many Rivers**  
Tales from the Riverbanks  
Imtiaz Ahmed

# Views of a Fisherman

# 7<sup>th</sup> International Water Conference

Title: **Teesta River Basin:  
Overcoming the Challenges**

Date: 20-22 January 2020

Venue: RDRS, Rangpur (hybrid)

**TEESTA RIVER BASIN:  
OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES**

**CALL FOR ABSTRACT PROPOSALS**

ActionAid Bangladesh is organizing the 7th International Water Conference 2022 on "Teesta River Basin: Overcoming the challenges".

As a continuation of ActionAid Bangladesh's advocacy on pro-people water justice and people's indigenous rights to the rivers, This year, the conference aims at informing and sensitizing key stakeholders on the existing challenges faced by the communities along the Teesta riverbank and solicit solutions to overcome the water disputes. The session will also stock take on the anthropogenic impacts on the river morphology and regional disputes.

The 3-day long hybrid event will provide a formidable platform to bring together, targeted stakeholders including public authorities, civil society, academics, the private sector, and grassroots communities.

**7TH INTERNATIONAL WATER CONFERENCE 2022**

Date: 20-22 January 2022  
Venue: Rangpur (hybrid)

For More Information visit: [actionaidbd.org](http://actionaidbd.org) and [watermuseum.net](http://watermuseum.net)

**Thematic Areas of Discussion**

- *Theme 1: History, morphology, and spatiotemporal changes of Teesta and surrounding river*
- *Theme 2: Structural interventions and anthropogenic impacts on Teesta River Basin*
- *Theme 3: The changing geopolitics and the Teesta River basin*
- *Theme 4: Teesta River Basin and its Ecosystem*
- *Theme 5: Teesta River Basin and Gender Implications*

**Abstract Submission**

We welcome the submission of abstracts under the thematic areas.  
Please note the following **deadlines for submission**

- **Submission of Abstract: December 16th, 2021 (Thursday)**
- **Word Limit: 350 words(Maximum)**
- **Submission of Full Paper: December 28th, 2021 (upon selection of abstract)**

Please submit the abstract: [Form](#).

**Fellowship**

This year the top 3 research papers (2 National & 1 International) will be awarded with 3-month fellowship to assist them to transform their research into action.  
The fellowship acknowledges individuals' significant contributions to the field of Water Governance, Social equity, and Transboundary water issues.

Photo Courtesy: International RiverDay

For further queries email: [tariquL.rifat@actionaid.org](mailto:tariquL.rifat@actionaid.org)

# Join Us!

Water Museum needs to be **replicated** across the country. We are inviting **funders** to support the development of a bigger facility and a replication across the country. We also invite **donors** to make donations.

Hopefully, the hubs in strategic river-centric locations will generate **discourse** in favour of water-centric development and stop the ongoing man-made **water crisis** in South-Asia

Contact: [shahrin.mannan@actionaid.org](mailto:shahrin.mannan@actionaid.org)



[www.watermuseum.net](http://www.watermuseum.net)

[Water Museum on Facebook page](#)

**act:onaid**

**Thank You**